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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - MIDDLE EAST - ABBAS IN
WASHINGTON CENTRAL ASIA: UZBEKISTAN DARFUR AND NATO
PARIS - FRIDAY, MAY 27, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

- [1](#)1. MIDDLE EAST - ABBAS IN WASHINGTON
- [1](#)2. CENTRAL ASIA: UZBEKISTAN
- [1](#)3. DARFUR AND NATO

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

IN THE WANING DAYS BEFORE THE VOTE ON MAY 29 TO RATIFY THE EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION, PRESIDENT CHIRAC GAVE HIS ALL IN A TELEVISED ADDRESS LAST EVENING WARNING THE FRENCH AGAINST "MISTAKING WHICH QUESTION WAS AT ISSUE." EXPLAINING THAT THE VOTE WAS NOT A VOTE "FOR OR AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT," HE REMINDED VOTERS THEY HAD A "HISTORIC RESPONSIBILITY." THE LAST POLL BEFORE THE VOTE INDICATES THAT THE "NO" IS CONSOLIDATING ITS LEAD WITH 55 PERCENT. EVEN BEFORE THIS FINAL POLL, YESTERDAY AFTERNOON'S LE MONDE HEADLINED: "POLITICAL LEADERS ANTICIPATE A VICTORY FOR THE 'NO'." TODAY'S HEADLINES RUN THE GAMUT FROM "PANIC AT THE ELYSEE PALACE" (POPULAR LE PARISIEN), TO "EUROPE AND FRANCE HOLDING THEIR BREATH" (LES ECHOS) AND "THE LAST DITCH FOR THE 'YES'" (LIBERATION). LE FIGARO QUOTES THE PRESIDENT IN ITS HEADLINE: "DO NOT MISTAKE THE QUESTION AT ISSUE."

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY IS ALSO VARIED. LE FIGARO COMMENTS: "CHIRAC WAS CLEAR: IF THE 'NO' WINS HE WILL NOT LEAVE OFFICE." BUT LE FIGARO ALSO ADDS: "THE EUROPEAN VERTIGO GRIPPING FRANCE IS NOT A FRENCH EXCEPTION. IT HAS GRIPPED OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, NAMELY THE NETHERLANDS." BUT YVES THREARD ENDS ON A LESS THAN OPTIMISTIC NOTE: "THE PRESIDENT'S WARNING SOUNDED VERY MUCH LIKE WISHFUL THINKING. ON SUNDAY, MANY WILL BE THINKING ABOUT NATIONAL ISSUES, LIKE UNEMPLOYMENT, SCHOOLS AND THEIR BUYING POWER. EVEN IF A 'NO' VOTE WILL NOT ALLEVIATE THEIR CONCERNS."

IN LIBERATION, JEAN-MICHEL THENARD WRITES: "CHIRAC WAS SOMEWHAT PATHETIC AS HE USED HIS LAST ARGUMENTS TO SAVE THE 'YES.' HE WAITED TOO LONG TO ADDRESS NATIONAL CONCERNS. AND SO ON SUNDAY, HE RUNS THE RISK OF BEING LABELED AS THE POLITICIAN WHO PROMOTED THE IDEA THAT EUROPE MEANS LIBERALISM, WHEN IN FACT EUROPE IS THE MOST SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC OF ALL CONTINENTS. AND THE BEST RAMPART AGAINST AMERICAN HEGEMONY."

FOR LA TRIBUNE, "ONLY REGRETS WILL REMAIN AFTER SUNDAY'S 'NO' VOTE AND AFTER A STRANGE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN, SEVERELY CRITICIZED BY OUR EUROPEAN NEIGHBORS."

CATHOLIC LA CROIX CONCLUDES IN ITS COMMENTARY: "SUNDAY'S VERDICT WILL BE TERRIBLE FOR HALF OF THE VOTERS. AND IF THE 'NO' WINS, IT WILL BE TERRIBLE FOR MANY MORE EUROPEANS, BECAUSE THE ISSUES AT STAKE GO BEYOND FRANCE." FM BARNIER IS INTERVIEWED: "I BELIEVE THERE ARE TWO VISIONS OF EUROPE. ONE, FRANCO-GERMAN, THE OTHER ANGLO-SAXON, WHICH IS PUSHING FOR A SUPERMARKET-TYPE EUROPE WITH A MINIMUM AMOUNT OF REGULATIONS AND A MAXIMUM OF COMPETITION. A 'NO' VICTORY WILL OPEN THE DOOR TO A FREE TRADE EUROPE, ANGLO SAXON-STYLE."

IN INTERNATIONAL NEWS THE MIDDLE EAST AND MAHMUD ABBAS'S TRIP TO WASHINGTON ARE FRONT-PAGED IN LE FIGARO: "BUSH CONFIRMS HIS SUPPORT FOR A PALESTINIAN STATE." INSIDE, JERUSALEM CORRESPONDENT PATRICK SAINT-PAUL DRAWS A PORTRAIT OF ABBAS, "THE GOOD STUDENT OF DEMOCRATIZATION." (SEE PART C) IN AN INTERVIEW AVI PAZNER, THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT'S SPOKESMAN EXPLAINS: "SINCE THE ARRIVAL OF ABBAS, THE GENERAL ATMOSPHERE HAS CHANGED. AND THE REAL CHANGE IS THAT NOW THERE IS A DIALOGUE." LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE DEVOTES ITS EDITORIAL TO THE "UZBEK TRAGEDY" IN WHICH IT CRITICIZES PRESIDENT BUSH FOR HIS "LIGHT CONDEMNATION" AGAINST KARIMOV'S REGIME. (SEE PART C) LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION AND RIGHT-OF-CENTER FRANCE SOIR DEVOTE WIDE COVERAGE TO DARFUR AND NATO'S INVOLVEMENT. THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE U.S. THAT IT WILL CONTRIBUTE 50 MILLION DOLLARS TO DARFUR RELIEF IS NOTED. (SEE PART C) FRANCE SOIR INTERVIEWS THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM, JEAN-JACQUES GRAISSE: "FRANCE IS RANKED 14TH AMONG THE DONORS. FAR BEHIND THE U.S., THE UK, GERMANY AND JAPAN. BUT EU CONTRIBUTIONS ARE IMPORTANT AND FINANCED IN PART BY FRANCE."

A NUMBER OF REPORTS IN ALL OUTLETS SPECULATE ABOUT THE FATE OF ZARQAWI. FRANCE SOIR ASKS "HAS ZARQAWI LEFT IRAQ?" BUT STATES IN ITS ARTICLE THAT "WITH OR WITHOUT HIM, THE AL-QAEDA NETWORK WILL CONTINUE." IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION TERRORISM EXPERT ANNE GIUDICELLI IS INTERVIEWED: "THE GROUND IS BEING LAID TO ANNOUNCE HIS DEATH. FOR WEEKS NOW AMERICAN AND IRAQI OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN SAYING THAT HE WAS WOUNDED NEAR RAMADI. BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE THIS HYPOTHESIS IS A U.S.-LED MANIPULATION."

IN ECONOMIC NEWS, THE ARRIVAL OF PASCAL LAMY AS THE HEAD OF THE WTO IS FRONT-PAGE NEWS FOR LA TRIBUNE, WHICH ALSO TITLES: "AIRBUS UNDER GROWING PRESSURE FROM BOEING." REPORTING ON THE NOMINATION OF A GERMAN, GUSTAV HUMBER, TO HEAD AIRBUS, LA TRIBUNE COMMENTS: "HE WILL BE UNDER PRESSURE NOT ONLY BECAUSE THIS IS A FIRST, BUT ALSO BECAUSE BOEING, THE RIVAL, IS MAKING AN IMPRESSIVE COMEBACK WITH A SERIES OF NEW ORDERS."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

MIDDLE EAST - ABBAS IN WASHINGTON

"BUSH PROMISES AN INDEPENDENT STATE FOR THE PALESTINIANS" PHILIPPE GELIE IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (05/26): "YESTERDAY PRESIDENT BUSH GAVE ABBAS WHAT HE HAD COME TO WASHINGTON FOR: HUMANITARIAN AID, STRONG POLITICAL SUPPORT AND THE PROMISE OF DIPLOMATIC INTERVENTION. WITHOUT GREATLY ALTERING HIS STANCE, PRESIDENT BUSH SHOWED THAT HE UNDERSTANDS THE PLIGHT OF THE PALESTINIANS, PUTTING THEM ALMOST ON PAR WITH THE ISRAELIS. BUSH'S DEMANDS ON SHARON PROVE THAT HE IS NOT BLIND TO SHARON'S GAME. BUT ALTHOUGH ABBAS IS THE FIRST PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT TO HAVE SET FOOT IN THE OVAL OFFICE IN FIVE YEARS, THE WHITE HOUSE DOES NOT WANT TO DANCE FASTER THAN THE MUSIC."

"ABBAS, THE GOOD STUDENT OF DEMOCRATIZATION" PATRICK SAINT-PAUL IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (05/27): "IN MATTERS OF DEMOCRATIZATION, ONE OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S CORE STRATEGIES FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, MAHMUD ABBAS STANDS AMONG THE GOOD STUDENTS. PRESIDENT BUSH CONGRATULATED ALL PALESTINIAN PARTICIPANTS IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, INCLUDING HAMAS, WHICH IS ON THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S BLACK LIST OF TERRORIST MOVEMENTS. BUSH'S 50 MILLION DOLLARS IN DIRECT AID IS A STRONG SYMBOLIC GESTURE AND A SIGN OF CONFIDENCE IN ABBAS AND HIS EFFORTS TO COMBAT CORRUPTION."

CENTRAL ASIA: UZBEKISTAN

"TRAGEDY IN UZBEKISTAN" LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE IN ITS EDITORIAL (05/27): "PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH, WHO IS OTHERWISE SO PROMPT TO GO TO WAR AGAINST TYRANNIES, LIMITED HIS REACTION TO THE INCIDENTS IN ANDIJAN TO A LIGHT CONDEMNATION. IT IS TRUE THAT UZBEKISTAN IS THE CORNERSTONE OF U.S. STRATEGY IN CENTRAL ASIA. AFTER 9/11, KARIMOV WAS THE FIRST LEADER IN THE REGION TO OFFER HELP TO THE U.S. FEARING THE SPREAD OF CIVIL WARS WHICH DEVELOPED IN AFGHANISTAN AND TAJIKISTAN, KARIMOV WAS AMENABLE TO THE AMERICANS OPENING MILITARY BASES IN TERRITORIES WHICH WERE ORIGINALLY RUSSIAN HUNTING GROUNDS. THE AMERICANS THANKED HIM BY HANDING OVER TERRORISTS OR ALLEGED TERRORISTS, KNOWING THAT THEY WOULD BE SUBJECTED TO TORTURE IN THE UZBEK JAILS. BUT THIS POLICY OF DOUBLE STANDARDS, WHICH IS UNFORTUNATELY NOT A U.S. PREROGATIVE AND IS NOT RESERVED EXCLUSIVELY TO RELATIONS WITH UZBEKISTAN, CANNOT TAKE AWAY FROM EFFORTS ACCOMPLISHED ELSEWHERE TO PROMOTE, IF NOT DEMOCRACY, AT LEAST 'DECENT' REGIMES. THE PEOPLE OF UZBEK, LIKE OTHERS, DESERVE BETTER THAN AN AUTHORITARIAN AND CORRUPT POLITICAL SYSTEM. IF THEY ARE ABANDONED TO THEMSELVES, IN THE NAME OF REALPOLITIK, ONE CAN PREDICT THAT THE DEAD OF ANDIJAN MAY NOT BE THE LAST."

DARFUR AND NATO

"MILITARY RIVALRY IN DARFUR BETWEEN NATO AND THE EU" JEAN-DOMINIQUE MERCHET IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (05/27): "NATO, BY PARTICIPATING IN THE DONORS' CONFERENCE FOR DARFUR IN ADDIS ABABA IMPOSED ITSELF AS A MAJOR PLAYER. THIS IS INDEED A FIRST. WITH THIS INITIATIVE, NATO IS WIDENING ITS RANGE OF ACTION WELL BEYOND EUROPE. THE AFRICAN UNION HAS CLEVERLY ORCHESTRATED THE SCENARIO, PUTTING NATO AND THE EU IN COMPETITION. THE LOGISTICAL SUPPORT WILL BE COORDINATED BY NATO, AND IN BRUSSELS THERE IS A FEELING OF ACHIEVEMENT, IN LIGHT OF THIS 'FIRST AFRICAN OPERATION, EVEN IF IT REMAINS MODEST.' THIS NATO INVOLVEMENT IS SERIOUSLY ANNOYING FRANCE, WHICH SWEARS BY THE EU AND NOTHING BUT THE EU. IT IS HARD FOR FRANCE TO STAND UNDER THE NATO BANNER JUST PRIOR TO RATIFYING THE EUROPEAN TREATY, WHICH IS SUPPOSED TO LAY THE GROUND FOR EUROPE'S DEFENSE AND SECURITY INITIATIVE. BUT OFFICIALLY AT LEAST, WHEN IT COMES TO DARFUR, THERE IS NO CONTROVERSY. ON MONDAY, DEFENSE MINISTER ALLIOT-MARIE REITERATED THERE WAS 'NO RIVALRY BETWEEN THE EU AND NATO' AND YESTERDAY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKE OF 'COMPLEMENTARITY.' STILL, WHILE FRANCE HAS DETAILED THE SUPPORT IT IS PUTTING AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE EU, ITS CONTRIBUTION TO NATO IS NIL. EVEN IF FOR YEARS IT HAS PARTICIPATED IN MAJOR NATO OPERATIONS IN KOSOVO AND ELSEWHERE. NATO'S COMMITMENT IN DARFUR IS THE RESULT OF A DIRECT REQUEST FROM THE AMERICANS FURTHER TO KONARE'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON. 'AND WHO SUGGESTED THE IDEA TO KONARE?' ASK THE FRENCH WITH A DOSE OF SARCASM." WOLFF